

AUNTY FAY CARTER

Class grouping:

Whole class and pairs (if desired)

Time:

20 minutes

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to introduce students to the achievements of Australian Indigenous female activist, Fay Carter or 'Aunty Fay'. Aunty Fay's work has focused on women's Indigenous affairs including Indigenous advancement, community engagement and welfare, and Indigenous aged care. Her support and active involvement in Indigenous issues continues to inspire both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The activity in this resource works well if the teacher is able to read the attached excerpt before commencing the lesson. This enables the identification of difficult vocabulary words that may require further elaboration. Younger students may also need to be supported as they fill out the chronology chart.

Activities:

1. Whole class activity: Read attached excerpt on Aunty Fay's life and achievements.
2. Whole class activity (individually or in pairs): complete chronology on Aunty Fay's achievements.

Preparation and Materials:

- Read 'Aunty Fay Carter' excerpt prior to class to familiarise yourself with the text.
- Print copies of reading material and chronology framework for students.

Activity 1

Whole class activity: Read the following document as a class:

Aunty Fay Carter

For more than 40 years, Aunty Fay Carter has dedicated herself to Victoria's Aboriginal community. Following in the proud tradition of self-determination, her work has helped strengthen families, reform welfare programs, and set the standard for Aboriginal aged care services.

This Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung Senior Elder was born at Echuca Hospital in 1935. Aboriginal women were not permitted in the maternity ward at the time, which meant Fay's mother, Iris Nelson, gave birth to her on the hospital's verandah.

Fay grew up on the outskirts of Mooroopna, in a settlement known as the Flats. Most of the Aboriginal families that resided there, including Fay's family, were formerly of the Cummeragunja Mission in New South Wales. In 1939, they had left in protest against the mismanagement of the mission. The Cummeragunja walk-off, as it became known, was a landmark event in the history of the Aboriginal rights movement in Australia.

Although they existed on the margins of society, Fay's relatives proved resourceful and resilient; they made the best of life on the Flats, despite constant hardships that included regular floods. Families supported one another, so Fay's early years were contented ones.

With seasonal farm work taking her mother away for extended periods of time, Fay spent much of her childhood in the care of her maternal grandmother, Priscilla Nelsen, née James. Fay's grandmother looked after 19 children, including Fay and her siblings. She was an influential figure during those formative years, imparting wisdom and life lessons that have guided Aunty Fay in later life.

After attending the state school in Mooroopna, Fay went on to high school in Shepparton, and then Echuca, where she completed second form (Year 8). Her first job was at the same hospital she had been born in. Employment at a local fruit shop followed—Fay is thought to have been the first Aboriginal girl in Echuca to work in retail.

In 1954, at the age of 18 years, Fay married Leslie Carter. The couple went on to have two children, Wendy and Rodney. As well as raising her young family, Fay worked in various jobs, and also ran a service station for a time. The family relocated to Melbourne in 1972.

In Melbourne, Fay became increasingly involved in Aboriginal affairs, motivated by the work of the community leaders who would become her mentors. In 1973, she successfully applied for a field officer role at the Aborigines Advancement

League (AAL). At the same time, she returned to study, completing several courses including a welfare officer qualification and an Associate Diploma in Community Development.

The year 1982 saw Fay employed by the Victorian Department of Social Security as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer. She later returned to AAL as the Community Development and Welfare Program Coordinator, and spent several years as a committee member.

One of Aunty Fay's proudest and most recognised achievements has been her work at the Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES). Fay was among a group of resolute people, led by Aunty Iris Lovett-Gardiner, who saw a need for culturally appropriate aged care services for Aboriginal Elders. Together they worked tirelessly to establish ACES, the first Aboriginal-controlled community organisation of its kind in Australia.

Fay helped lobby for the land and funding that allowed ACES to build a 'caring place' in East Brunswick. Opened in 1992, the centre provides a safe environment in which the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Elders is supported. Fay went on to manage ACES for 16 years, during which time she overcame many challenges and funding shortfalls, even forgoing a salary when money was tight. Many attribute the continued success of ACES to Aunty Fay's perseverance and hard work. It is a legacy she dedicates to the Elders from whom she has drawn strength and inspiration.

Many other organisations and committees have benefited from Aunty Fay's rational thinking and strength of spirit. She was a founding member of Australia's first Aboriginal women's refuge. During 11 years as a board member of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)—ten of which were spent as Chair—she helped draft and implement the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, which governs the practice of Aboriginal child protection services in Victoria. Her work saw her recognised as a life member of VACCA in 1991.

From 1974 to 1990, Fay was a member of the Victorian branch of the National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC), including five years as president. She completed two terms as an elected councillor on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, and has served on the Austin Hospital Community Advisory Committee, the Kulin Nation Cultural Heritage Program, and the board of Worawa Aboriginal College.

Although she formally retired at the age of 72 years, Aunty Fay's commitment to her community remains strong. She participated in eighteen months of intense negotiations with the Victorian government to achieve a landmark native title settlement in 2013, which formally recognised the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the traditional owners of lands in central Victoria. As a result, approximately 266,532 hectares of Crown land has been handed back and support mechanisms for recognition and community development put in place.

Aunty Fay's resolve to find better outcomes for vulnerable families has led to an ongoing role in the Aboriginal Family Decision Making Program, a three-way partnership between the Victorian Department of Human Services, VACCA and an Elder from ACES. The program aims to keep young Aboriginal people safe and connected to their community.

In 2001, Aunty Fay received a Centenary Medal. She was inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women in 2004 and made patron for VACCA's Child Abuse Conference the same year. In 2013, she was inducted onto the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll and, that same year, she appeared in a campaign to launch the *First Peoples* exhibit at Melbourne Museum's Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre. She is happiest when with her five beloved grandchildren—Drew, Joshua, Natasha, Neane and Rodney Jnr—for whom she has immense pride.

Whether through her work for government, or the community-run organisations she has served, Aunty Fay has always strived for the best outcomes for Aboriginal people. Many have lived healthier and more prosperous lives as a result¹.

¹ The following resource was used in the preparation of this resource. It was altered where appropriate to suit a secondary school audience.

Activity 2

Complete the chronology on Aunty Fay's achievements.

Date	Event/Achievement
1935	
1939	
1954	
1972	
1973	
1982	
1992	
2001	
2004	
2013	